

**Early Childhood Education:
Foundation for Learning and Readiness for School &
A Key Component of the State's Economic Vitality**

- **Recent research on early brain development demonstrates that a child's early experiences form the foundation for learning.** In fact, from birth to 3 years old, 90% of a child's brain is developed. If children do not receive high-quality early learning experiences, the learning readiness gap has been set.
- **High-quality early childhood education is one of the most effective strategies to ensure children begin school with the skills they need to succeed** and is associated with higher reading skills, better test scores and fewer behavioral problems. Low quality care can have the opposite effect.
- **Children who attend full-day kindergarten are better prepared to succeed in 1st grade and beyond.** Research has demonstrated that full-day kindergarten can lower grade retention, improve language and math skills, lead to higher achievement test scores in 8th grade, and improve attendance and social skills.
- **Early childhood education includes:** parent education and family support programs, child care, preschool, family child care, relative care, Early Head Start and Head Start, full-day kindergarten, early intervention and linkage to health services.
- **Parents need to be informed consumers so they can know that their children are in high-quality early childhood settings.** Children may spend more than 30 hours per week for years in out-of-home care before they start kindergarten. Arizona regulates for health and safety of some out-of-home care, but does not measure the quality of that care.
- **Arizona has one of the worst dropout rates in the nation and achievement scores have consistently been below the national average.** Children who are not reading by the third grade are at a greatly increased chance of never catching up and achieving proficiency and dropping out of school.
- **A young person who drops out of school has a high chance of becoming a drain on the economy, rather than a productive member of society.** Thus, it is in all of our best interests to give children the tools they need early on for success. Studies have demonstrated that for every \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood education, there is a corresponding \$8 in long-term savings in criminal justice, welfare and other costs.
- **A better-educated workforce will help Arizona's economy by attracting new business and workers to the State.** "Five Shoes Waiting to Drop" a report by the Morrison Institute for Public Policy found that the quality of the State's education system is the number one priority that can attract new business and knowledge economy workers to the State. In other words, Arizona's poorly performing education system deters business from coming to Arizona.
- **Business and community leaders throughout the State understand the importance of high-quality early childhood education** and are bringing their leadership and resources to build a stronger system for Arizona. There is a great deal of momentum in the public and private sectors to begin revamping the system.

-More on Back-

Governor Napolitano's 5-year School Readiness Action Plan

*Arizona must be more than a great state to grow old in. It must also be a great state to grow up.
Governor Janet Napolitano, State of the State address - January 12, 2004*

Governor Napolitano's 5-year School Readiness Action Plan is the starting point for building a high quality early childhood education system that supports the learning and development of Arizona's youngest children. The goal is to ensure that all children in Arizona begin 1st grade safe, healthy and ready to succeed.

Action Steps:

1. **Provide parent education and family support programs that strengthen families and promote school readiness** by ensuring that Healthy Families, a strength-based child abuse prevention program, is available statewide; by providing parents with information on early brain development and by promoting early literacy efforts.
2. **Improve children's access to health care by increasing the number of children who receive well-child health screens** and by training health professionals in assessment and referral of children with developmental delays. Includes medical, behavioral, oral and developmental health.
3. **Offer child care providers and preschools access to health professionals** to improve the health and safety of their programs by working with community groups, state agencies and health professionals to implement a childcare health consultation system.
4. **Create public-private partnerships to build the capacity of local communities to provide quality early childhood education** by establishing the Governor's Early Education Fund to raise and allocate private dollars to local communities and programs.
5. **Improve the quality of early childhood education and inform parents of the quality of programs** by developing a Quality Rating System whereby parents can ascertain the quality of childcare they choose for their child and childcare providers receive technical and financial assistance to improve quality and by improving care for infants and toddlers.
6. **Increase the pool and retention of qualified early childhood professionals** by building a statewide scholarship program, instituting an Early Education Emerging Leaders program and through a wage enhancement program.
7. **Help families who earn low wages to afford the cost of childcare.** The state provides a portion of the payment for childcare for children of poor families who have incomes up to 165% of the federal poverty level. Due to budget shortfalls, a waiting list for childcare subsidies was begun. The Governor reduced the waiting list by \$51 million in FY 2005 and plans to eliminate it in FY 2006.
8. **Enhance students' chances of academic success by phasing-in voluntary full-day kindergarten for all Arizona children.** The Governor obtained \$25 million to begin with children attending schools with more than 90% of students eligible for the free/reduced price lunch program. Arizona requires that schools provide voluntary half-day kindergarten.
9. **Increase the state's investment in high quality preschool** by redirecting the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) to high quality preschool, as full-day kindergarten is phased-in.
10. **Coordinate early childhood education functions between state agencies, Head Start and Tribes** by convening a Coordination Team of state agencies, Head Start and Tribes under the auspices of the State School Readiness Board.